Enduring Popular Images and Party Symbols

The most enduring images in American political life are those drawn from the natural world—rivers and springs reflect the ever-changing course of politics, monsters suggest the carefully apportioned boundaries of congressional districts, and animals have come to represent the major political parties.

The Gerry-Mander

This “Gerry-Mander” cartoon first appeared in the Boston Gazette, March 26, 1812, and was quickly reprinted in Federalist newspapers in Salem and Boston. The cartoon expressed opposition to state election districts newly redrawn by Massachusetts’ Jeffersonian Democratic-Republican Party, led by Governor Elbridge Gerry. Fearing that the Federalist Party would gain power in the 1812 election, Gerry consolidated Federalist voting strength in a salamander-shaped voting district. The practice—though not invented by Gerry—became known as a “gerrymandering.”

“Essex South District Formed into a Monster!” Salem Gazette, April 2, 1813
Gift of the Honorable Michael V. DiSalle in memory of Thomas H. Williams

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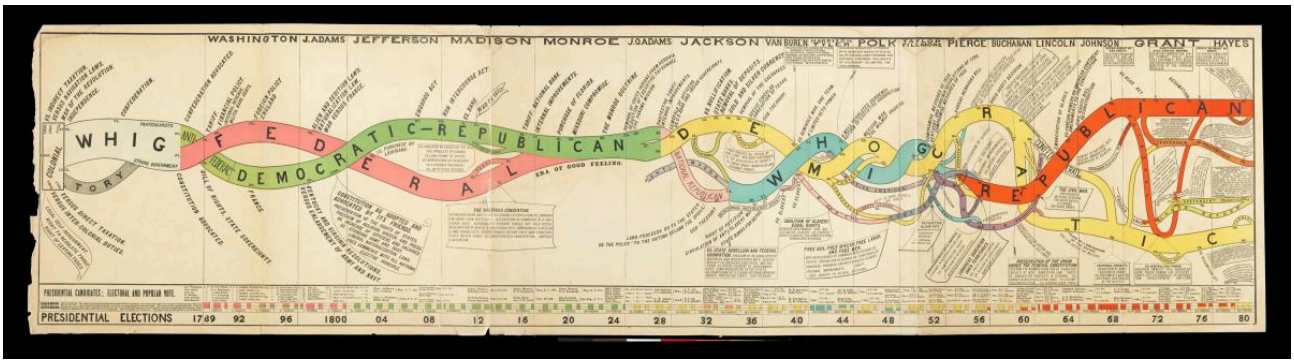
The Rise and Fall of American Political Parties



"Diagram of the Rise and Fall of American Political Parties, from 1789 to 1880, inclusive," from *Conspectus of the History of Political Parties and the Federal Government*, by Walter R. Houghton, 1880
Gift of Ralph E. Becker Collection of Political Americana

This ambitious chart presents U.S. political history on a single page. Moving from left to right, a timeline of parties, policies, persons, and events courses like a river through graphic space marked in four-year intervals. The analogy between politics and springs and rivulets (that jump and rejoin their banks) is the most conspicuous feature of the timeline. The parties appear in different colors. The ascendance of a party is gauged as its stream rises above the centerline, and above the streams of other parties. The thickness of a stream indicates the party's strength. The diagram is meant to dramatize U.S. political history in a more accessible shape for educators and to offer a ready reference for scholars, statisticians, and statesmen.

Hours & Admission

Open every day, except December 25, from 10:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.

Admission is free and no tickets are required.

Location & Contact

1300 Constitution Ave NW,
Washington, DC 20560 <https://www.google.com/maps/place/smithsonian+national+museum+of+american+history/@38.8912835,-77.0322449,17z>

Contact Information </about/contact>

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